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A Dissertation on Rheumatism

by

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of Virginia

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Preface.

In preparing myself a candidate for the ensuing examination, it is incumbent on me to exhibit an inaugural dissertation, which nothing but a strict compliance with that institute imposed on us by the university of Pennsylvania, would have induced me at this early period of my study to have undertaken; for the limited experience which I have had on the chambers of the sick will not enable me to suggest any thing new; or warrant me in corroborating any fact which I may adduce.

To indulge in physiological speculations to you it would be thought rather ostentatious pedantry, than the result of elaborate discrimination.

And I am well aware that a prolix series of reiterated facts would detract

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more from your patience than it would contribute to my merit.

Of its imperfection I am not insensible.

With these persuasions I submit it to the care and liberality which have long paved the path of men of magnanimity and genius.

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Rheumatism.

The characteristicks of rheumatism as, assigned by Dr Cullen are pyrexia, pain about the parts following the tracts of muscles, attacking the knees and larger articulations, in preference to those of the feet and hands, increased by external heat.

This disease has been divided by nosologists into acute and chronick; being known by the former appellation, when there is a great degree of pyrexia and inflammation present, and by the latter when there is no great degree of fever or inflammation attending, but merely pains upon motion.

Rheumatism may arise at any time of the year, when there are frequent vicissitudes of weather from heat to cold; but the spring and autumn are seasons in which it is most prevalent; and it attacks persons of all ages; but very young people are more exempt from it than adults.

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alternations of heat and cold, are particularly liable to be affected with rheumatism, Dr Cullen thinks a hereditary taint gives predisposition to it.

Rheumatism in some respects bears a strong resemblance to gout, still in other respects it differs from it very materially.

It does not usually come on so suddenly as a fit of gout, but for the most part gives the patient warning by a slow and gradual increase of pain.

Neither is it fixed to one part like gout, but is distinguished by its frequent wandering from place to place, accompanied by a sense of numbness.

It seldom attacks small joints, but is confined chiefly to the larger, as the hips, knees and shoulders; gout is almost always preceded by an affection of the stomach which is rarely the case in rheumatism.

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pyrexia is preceded by rigors and a sense of cold. A febrile, quick, and hard pulse supervenes; the veins near the heart swell and a throbbing pain is felt in the arteries.

By degrees the pain increases, and the patient suffers cruel torture, which is increased on the slightest motion.

The sense of pain resembles that of a slow dilaceration of the parts, and commonly goes off by a swelling of the joint or joints.

Acute rheumatism may be produced by various causes, such as obstructed perspiration occasioned by wearing wet clothes, lying in damp linen; or when one part of the body is exposed to cold while the other is warm, or when the application of cold is long continued, as it is when wet or moist clothes are applied to any part of the body.

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thirty five are most liable to be affected with this painful malady.

Sometimes the pyrexia is formed before any pains are perceived, but more commonly pains are felt in particular parts, before any symptoms of pyrexia appear.

Dr Caldwell thinks the pyrexia never precedes local irritation.

Inflammation in acute rheumatism appears to be of a nature sui generis, for although it is accompanied with a considerable degree of apparent inflammation, it never ends in suppuration of a pure kind, sometimes a serous or gelatinous effusion takes place.

There is not much danger to be apprehended from an attack of acute rheumatism, it usually goes off spontaneously or is easily removed by the timely employment of proper remedies, but in some instances the patient has

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been destroyed by a metastasis to some vital part such as the heart, lungs, or head.

The head in general is not much affected. neither is the stomach and bowels, though sometimes the bowels are very costive.

Early in the course of the disease some degree of sweating occurs; but it seldom removes the pain or proves either salutary or critical, and it is very singular that the pained limb should remain dry, when sweat is on the rest of the body.

In the beginning of the disease the urine is high coloured and without sediment; but as the disease advances, the fever admits of considerable remissions, a lateritious sediment is deposited, but this does not entirely prove critical.

As rheumatism seldom proves fatal very few opportunities have offered for dissection to ascertain the seat of

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the disease. In the few opportunities which have occurred, thickning of the membranes, adhesions, and gelatinous effusions, are the only phenomena to be met with.

The principal thing to be attended to in the treatment of acute rheumatism will be to obviate the general inflammation which exists in the system, and this is to be effected by strictly persuing the antiphlogistick regimen, and venesection in all cases where vascular action is strong, the constitution robust, and the heat of the body considerable; proportioning the quantity we abstract to the violence of the symptoms and the age, strength, and habit of the patient. In weak irritable habits where no great degree of general inflammation, and little or no fever attends, and where the inflammation is chiefly local or pain

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not violent, topical bleeding by means of several leeches applied to the part affected, may be substituted for the lancet, and will often afford essential relief.
Dr Rush thought them very efficacious even where much inflammation prevailed in the system, being premised by venesection. When leeches cannot be procured, scarifying and cupping may be employed in their stead.

As an auxiliary to venesection in abating the phlogistick diathesis, purging must be resorted to, the best of which is calomel and the neutral salts.
Dr Cullen thinks much purging would have a pernicious tendancy, by causing the patient much pain in going to stool.
In order to moderate the increased arterial action which may exist in the system, the use of digitalis purpurea has been proposed as a remedy.
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advantage from it, he made use of the tincture in doses, from fifteen to twenty drops every six hours.

When the general pyrexia has been in a great measure subdued, and the pain confined principally to one part, blisters as an auxiliary to the remedies previously mentioned may have a happy effect, or we may rub the part with some rubefacient liniment; but where the pain is wandering and there are frequent translations from one joint to another, neither of these remedies will be very salutary.

The application of ice has been used in acute rheumatism, but its application appears to be rather precarious, though in Russia it is very frequently used with decided advantage, the application of cloths steeped in a solution of muriate of ammonia, with nitrate of potash, has been used with much advantage.

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been made, diaphoretics may then be used, those of the antimonial kind promise most advantage, they may be given in small doses and frequently repeated. To increase the effect of this remedy the patient should at the same time be enveloped in flannel, every article of linen being removed and as soon as he begins to sweat, and not before, lest vomiting be induced, the patient may drink freely of diluents, such as herb tea, barley water and wine whey, as an auxiliary remedy, warmth applied to the extremeties, especially to the affected parts will be very beneficial.

It may either be applied in the form of fomentations, or in a dry way, by warm bottles or bricks wrapped in flannel. Where there are intermissions of pain, a clean and moist tongue, a perspiring skin, and a lateritious sediment in the urine the use of cinchona bark will no doubt

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do much good. In acute rheumatism the patient ought to abstain from all stimulating articles of food or drink.

The characteristick symptoms by which chronick rheumatism may be discriminated from acute, are the absence of fever redness and swelling of the joints, but pains still continue to affect certain joints, which remains stiff and feels uneasy upon motion or change of weather from hot to cold.

Chronick rheumatism may affect different joints; but is more ready to affect those that are surrounded with many muscles, and those in which the muscles are employed in the most constant and vigorous exertions.

Violent strains and spasms occurring on sudden and violent exertions, bring on rheumatick affections, which at first partake of acute, but very soon changes into the nature of chronick rheumatism.

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Supposing the proximate cause of chronick rheumatism as pointed out by, Dr Cullen to be correct, which is an atony, both of the blood-vessels and of the muscular fibres of the part affected; together with a degree of rigidity and contraction in the latter.

Then the indication of cure will be very simple, which will be to restore the vigour of the vital principle in the part affected.

This may be effected by electricity, the application of cold water in the form of a shower bath, if it does not produce chilliness, but is succeeded by a pleasant glow on the surface of the body, has done much good in chronick rheumatism. It undoubtedly imparts tone to the skin and hence to the muscles or diseased part. Bandaging the diseased limb tightly with a flannel roller has been highly recommended by Dr Chapman, he supposes it gives support to the muscles of the diseased part, aids the

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circulation in them, prevents in them the sensation of fatigue, & thus restores to them their lost tone. It produces a new impression, hence arises a new action, which effectually obliterates the morbid association where in the disease consists.

The steam bath of Dr Jennings of Virginia promises much advantage when properly applied. Exercise, either of the part itself so far as it can easily bear it, or of the whole body, by riding or any other mode of gestation will be very advantageous.

Rubbing the diseased parts with stimulant embrocations may be very beneficial.

There are a number of stimulating remedies that are used internally, such as the spirits of turpentine; gum guaicum in substance or in tincture; a decoction of serpentaria; volatile alkali; Dovers powder, all have been

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used under particular circumstances with apparent utility; juniperus sabina has been very highly extolled by Dr Chapman, as a remedy in this disease, he said it requires very great discrimination to know when to administer it, he generally gives it in that stage where there exists great exhaustion of the system, with an unusal degree of coldness and want of action on the surface of the body.

The primary effects of this medicine, at least its sensible effects, are heat of the whole system with much itching, and ultimately a slight perspiration, which however seems to be extorted by the mere force of excitement.

There are sometimes miliary eruptions on the skin.

The pulse which previous to its exhibiton is commonly, weak and accelerated, becomes full, active, and comparatively slow.

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No portion of the system seems to escape its wide pervading operation; every function being more or less invigorated, and especially some of the secretory offices, as the urinary, catamenial, and perhaps the seminal.

Contrary to a very uniform law of the animal economy by which it seems to be ordained that the vigour of the arterial and lymphatic apparatus should be in an inverse ratio, we have here indisputable evidence, in the removal of chalky depositions and of various morbid growths incident to this disease, of absorption being actively performed.

He thinks it equally adapted to the cure of syphilitick rheumatism.

Bruised mustard seed; sarsaparilla in decoction; oxide of arsenic; and cinchona bark, may all be used with advantage when properly administered.

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be administered in usual dose until a gentle ptyalism be produced, which, if the disease be of long standing, ought to be continued for a considerable length of time.

A few months since I had the pleasure of witnessing the powerful efficacy of a french remedy in chronick rheumatism, called Eau Medicinale, supposed by d'Hufson to be composed principally of veratrum album. ?

The patient, to whom it was administered, was a boy about sixteen years old, who had been affected with this disease for three years. he was very much emaciated, the mobility of the articulations of his knees was completely destroyed, he was wholly unable to walk.

The attending Physician had administered nearly all the remedies, that have been generally used in this disease without effect, when he thought he

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would try the remedy just mentioned.

That which he gave, he prepared by taking one part of laudanum combined with three parts of the tincture of veratrum album, the dose of which was ninety drops infused in a small quantity of water, taken in the morning while the patients stomach was empty. It produced slight nausia, followed by a gentle perspiration, and evacuation from his bowels.

The succeeding morning he was much better, the Physician gave him one hundred and twenty drops, the effect was very similar.

I saw the boy the third morning and much to my astonishment, the boy with a little assistance was able to walk.

The attending Physician still continued for several subsequent mornings to give small doses to the amount of twenty

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Ten days after its first administration the boy was perfectly convalescent.

The result of its administration in several other cases of chronick rheumatism were so nearly similar, I deem it a consumption of time to detail them.

In chronick rheumatism, the diet should be nutritive, but not heating.

Vinous and distilled liquors should be used sparingly.

In every instance where the physical powers of the system are weakened, perfect temperance, pure air, and moderate exercise are the best restoratives.

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